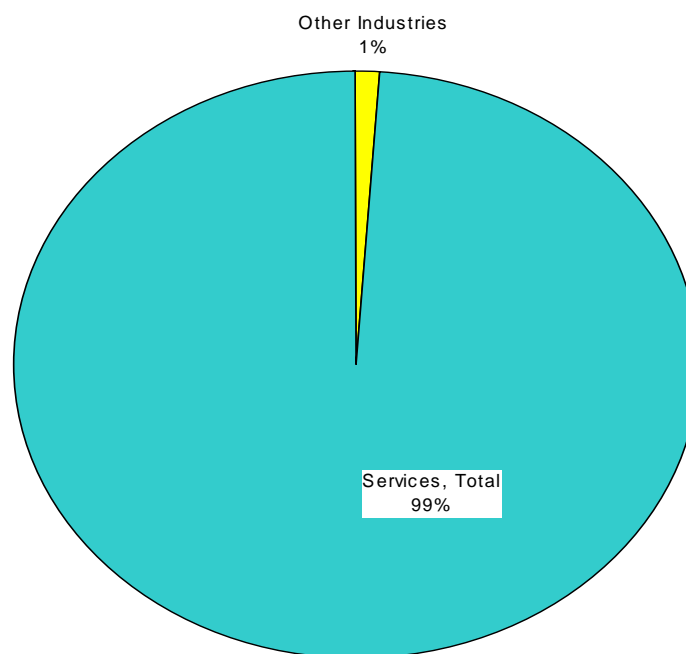


Job Description

Dental assistants perform a variety of patient care, office, and laboratory duties. They work chair-side as dentists examine and treat patients. They make patients as comfortable as possible in the dental chair, prepare them for treatment, and obtain dental records. Assistants hand instruments and materials to dentists, and keep patients' mouths dry and clear by using suction or other devices. Assistants also sterilize and disinfect instruments and equipment, prepare tray setups for dental procedures, and instruct patients on postoperative and general oral health care.

Some dental assistants prepare materials for making impressions and restorations, expose radiographs, and process dental x-ray film as directed by a dentist. They also may remove sutures, apply anesthetics to gums or cavity-preventive agents to teeth, remove excess cement used in the filling process, and place rubber dams on the teeth to isolate them for individual treatment. Those with laboratory duties make casts of the teeth and mouth from impressions taken by dentists, clean and polish removable appliances, and make temporary crowns. Dental assistants with office duties schedule and confirm appointments, receive patients, keep treatment records, send bills, receive payments, and order dental supplies and materials.

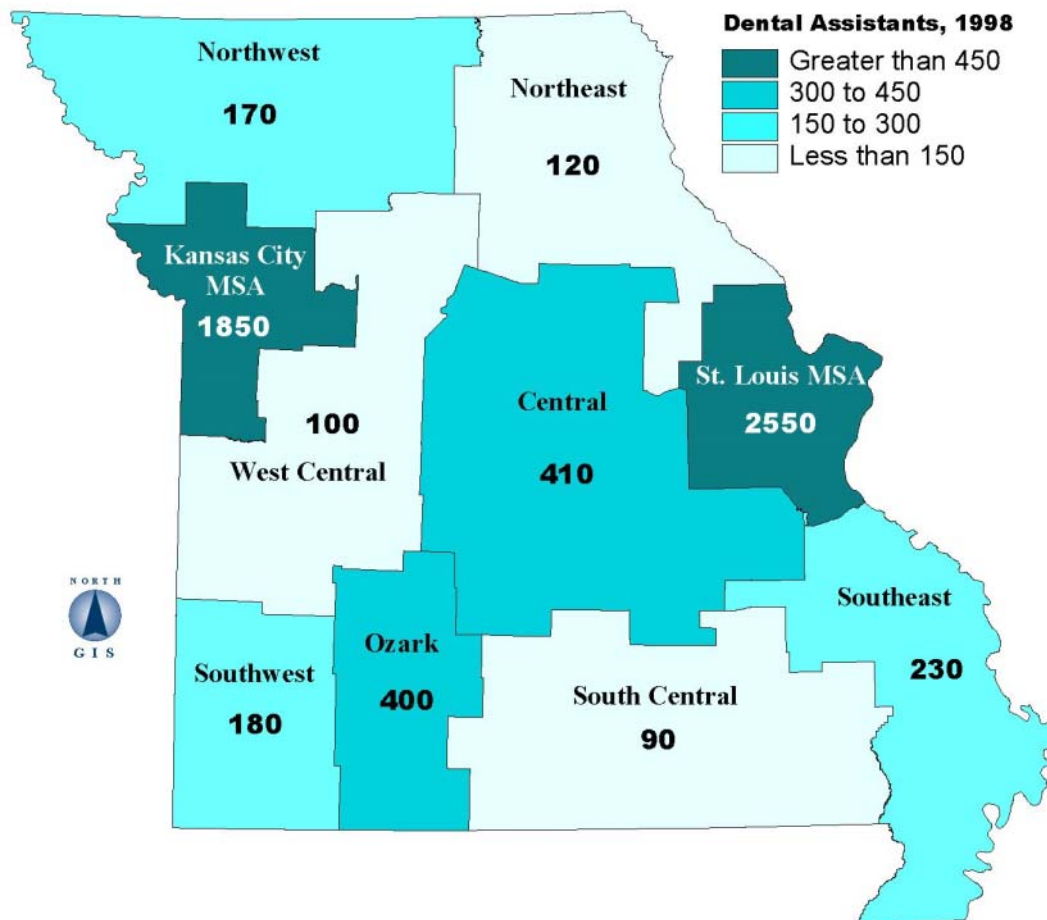
Employment by Industry



Employment Trends

Region	Employment		Projected Growth	Percent Change	Average Annual Openings
	1998	2008			
United States	229,000	325,000	97,000	42.2%	131,000
Missouri	4,680	6,180	1,500	32.1%	220
Northwest Region	170	210	40	23.5%	7
Northeast Region	120	150	30	25.0%	4
Kansas City MSA	1,850	2,230	380	20.5%	66
West Central Region	100	120	20	20.0%	4
Central Region	410	530	120	29.3%	18
St. Louis MSA	2,550	3,270	720	28.2%	111
Southwest Region	180	250	70	38.9%	10
Ozark Region	400	560	160	40.0%	22
South Central Region	90	110	20	22.2%	3
Southeast Region	230	280	50	21.7%	8

Source: Missouri Economic Research & Information Center, Projections Unit



Wage Information

Region	Average Hourly Wage	Average Annual Wage
United States	\$12.49	\$25,979
Missouri	\$11.61	\$24,149
Northwest Region	\$11.19	\$23,275
Northeast Region	N/A	N/A
Kansas City MSA	\$14.05	\$29,224
West Central Region	N/A	N/A
Central Region	\$9.60	\$19,968
St. Louis MSA	\$11.69	\$24,315
Southwest Region	\$9.19	\$19,115
Ozark Region	\$10.59	\$22,027
South Central Region	N/A	N/A
Southeast Region	\$9.95	\$20,696

Dental Assistants in Missouri make \$24,149 per year, about \$1,800 less than the national average. Because of the small numbers of hygienists in some rural areas of the state, not all regions have wage data for this occupation.

Source: Missouri Economic Research & Information Center, Occupational Employment Statistics Unit

Typical Tasks

- Prepares patient, sterilizes instruments, sets up instrument trays, prepares materials, and assists dentist.
- Takes and records medical and dental histories and vital signs of patients.
- Records treatment information in patient records.
- Assists dentist in management of medical and dental emergencies.
- Exposes dental diagnostic x-rays.
- Applies protective coating of fluoride to teeth.
- Provides postoperative instructions prescribed by dentist.
- Makes preliminary impressions for study casts.
- Pours, trims, and polishes study casts.
- Cleans and polishes removable appliances.
- Instructs patients in oral hygiene and plaque control programs.
- Schedules appointments, prepares bills, completes insurance forms, and maintains records.
- Cleans teeth, using dental instruments.
- Fabricates temporary restorations and custom impressions from preliminary impressions.

Skills Needed

- Coordination
- Active Listening
- Speaking
- Time Management
- Service Orientation
- Equipment Selection
- Information Organization
- Reading Comprehension

Preparation and Licensing Requirements

Necessary Education

- Certificate
(1 year or less) or
- Associate's Degree
(2 years at Community College)

Certification

This occupation does not require certification in Missouri. Dental assistants can become certified by passing an examination that evaluates their knowledge. Most dental assistants who choose to become nationally certified take the Dental Assisting National Board's (DANB) Certified Dental Assistant (CDA) examination.

Job Outlook

- Employment is expected to grow much faster than the average for all occupations.
- Almost half of dental assistants have a 35- to 40-hour workweek, which may include work on Saturdays or evenings.

Population growth and greater retention of natural teeth by middle-aged and older people will fuel demand for dental services. Older dentists, who are less likely to employ assistants, will leave and be replaced by recent graduates, who are more likely to use one, or even two. In addition, as dentists' workloads increase, they are expected to hire more assistants to perform routine tasks, so that they may devote their own time to more profitable procedures.

For More Information

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*Other Sources: United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, Missouri CHOICES, O*Net*